

The Jericho Project

Vocational and Educational Program

2013 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard
New York, New York 10027

Program Overview

The Jericho Project was founded in 1983 to provide housing and full supportive services to homeless men and women with substance abuse problems. Jericho currently operates five single-room occupancy buildings, with more than 200 units. Jericho's core services include: socialization and living skills, substance abuse counseling, vocational and educational training, and family reunification and aftercare.

All of Jericho's clients are in various stages of recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction. Sixty percent of Jericho's referrals come from New York City shelters, 20 percent from treatment programs, and another 20 percent from community referrals. In order to reside at Jericho, prospective residents must have been drug- and alcohol-free for a minimum of three months.

While the Jericho Project has always supported the concept that jobs are critical to an individual's recovery and return to independence, a vocational and education department was not established at Jericho until 1995. Today, this department includes four staff members, including a program director, job developer, education intake coordinator, and vocational coordinator. The department is located at Jericho's largest supportive housing building, a single-room occupancy facility, in Harlem. Currently, residents at other Jericho buildings come to the Harlem site to receive vocational services.

The goals of the department are to:

- ! Make vocational/educational services known and easily accessible to Jericho residents;
- ! Increase the vocational training and educational opportunities for all Jericho residents;
- ! Increase employment opportunities for all Jericho residents; and

- ! Assist residents in developing a strong work ethic.
Jericho provides the following training and vocational services to residents:
- ! Individualized vocational assessment, planning, and job search assistance;
- ! Jericho Works Program, which provides residents with the opportunity for pre-vocational training by working in various positions (maintenance, security, messenger, and front desk receptionist) at the supportive housing sites;
- ! In-house educational resources, including tutoring and evening classes;
- ! Job readiness workshops, which focus on the “soft skills” or basic life skills needed to interview for a job, as well as secure and maintain employment; and
- ! Supported employment through the nonprofit Computer Learning Center created by Jericho in 1998.

Jericho residents also have access to a wide range of educational programs available in New York City, including high school equivalency programs and community and four-year colleges. At any given time, roughly one-third of Jericho’s residents are enrolled in outside education programs.

Mission and Philosophy

Jericho’s program is based on the philosophy that providing homeless people with a home, supportive services, and job training gives them the motivation and skills they need to regain independence and dignity. According to Executive Director, Gene Estess, a “holistic approach” is essential to the recovery of alcoholics and drug abusers:

Generally speaking, drug programs. . .concentrate on the abstinence of substance. . .[and] don’t spend all that much time on financial management, on some of the life skills that are needed, so that when a person does and is able to become independent, is employed full-time, is off of welfare, is paying taxes, . . .they can manage their lives as well as manage their addiction problems.

The services provided by the vocational/educational department are designed to help residents ultimately obtain livable wage employment with benefits. To get there, they focus on individual needs and vocational interests of each client, helping them to set meaningful vocational goals and obtain the job of their choice.

At Jericho, individual success is measured by accomplishment, not by time, and “graduation” occurs when a person voluntarily decides they are ready to move out and become fully independent. But even then, as Mr. Estess explains, Jericho encourages former residents to maintain their ties to the Project:

Once a person. . .lives with us, they are entitled to all the services that we provide, . . .[even] after they leave. For example, if a graduate loses a job for one reason or another, they can come back to the vocational and educational department for help toward getting another job. We feel that's a lifetime commitment to any graduate. As a matter of fact, this morning I met a person on the street coming to work who left Jericho 10 years ago, . . .and he just lost his job. I said, 'Ron, we've come a long way since 10 years ago. We have a vocational and educational department. Here's my card, call me, let's get together. You'll bring your resume with you, and I will make sure the voc/ed department sees you and does anything that we can do to get you employed again,' and he was obviously delighted. But that's a lifetime commitment that we have. . . .

Assessment and Counseling

The vocational services offered at Jericho are described as “voluntary.” However, within two weeks of arriving at Jericho, most new residents are referred to the vocational and educational department by their in-house case managers. Lynette Choice, the department's director, advises that it is best to make new residents aware of available vocational services soon after their arrival. However, she also notes that these services cannot be pushed on any resident.

. . .What I do is try [to] provide opportunities initially, within the first two weeks someone gets here, just to come down and say, 'Hi, hello, this is who we are. You don't necessarily have to use this, but these are some of the things we do,' . . .so they get used to being able to come in and realize that there are different levels of service that are available.

We are not trying to force anybody to do anything; you can't really force people to do anything. They must see it as something that they have an interest in and that they need, and see that your services are useful to them.

When a client indicates a willingness to receive services, the vocational staff will arrange an initial appointment to begin the process of preparing an individualized vocational plan. The staff insist that this plan is *client-directed*. Fquira Johannes, the department's job developer, describes what this means:

When we work with clients at Jericho, counseling in and of itself is a client-centered process. So, when we begin to talk to the clients about what it is they want to accomplish, that's where we begin to set a goal and maybe set about some plan and talk about how we can implement that plan, the steps to reach

that goal. . . . We try to [develop] a broad range of goals that people would like to accomplish in terms of living, social, financial. . . but really the client decides what their goal is. . . .

Once the plan is developed, the client will work with the counselor to meet his or her goals. For some, this may mean pursuing appropriate training and/or literacy programs. For others, it may mean beginning the search for employment. Again, the department does not like to push employment until the resident feels ready. At the same time, changes to welfare reform laws mean that staff and clients do not always have the luxury of time to train and choose just the right job. As Ms. Choice describes,

People come here at different stages. . . . Some people may come into Jericho and say, 'I had completed a word processing course, but I never really had an opportunity to utilize this. And before I really go out there looking for a job, do you think I can do something that would help me to review those skills that I learned.' . . . So we'll try and access opportunities for them to do that. . . and then after that they'll work with the job developer, and she will try and help them find appropriate placement.

For those individuals who may have limited work experience or have been away from the world of work for a long time, Jericho offers opportunities for them to build their confidence and develop "soft skills." Through the Jericho Works Project, or JWP, residents can gain unpaid work experience by taking on an in-house job within their housing facility. The department staff will place residents as the front desk receptionist, or in security or maintenance positions. In doing so, staff are able to watch their performance, look at how they dress, how they act on the job, and general work habits. Weekly job readiness workshops, run by the department in the community room, offer an opportunity for staff to discuss basic work behavior and address issues that may have arisen as residents performed their duties.

Making vocational services easily accessible to residents is important according to Jericho staff. The fact that the department is located at Jericho's largest housing development is very beneficial according to Lynette Choice. Ms. Choice also works to make sure that the department is open and counselors are available whenever residents want to talk. To do this, she asks her staff to work staggered shifts. Ms. Choice also tries to have one staff member available to see clients on Saturday.

Jericho wants to increase the accessibility of vocational services to residents who live at its other four buildings. Currently, residents at the other sites must make an appointment with a vocational counselor at the Harlem site. In the next few months, Jericho plans to place a counselor at each of its sites. This will allow residents to become more familiar with their

vocational rehabilitation counselor and for the counselor to observe the clients in their environment.

Jericho's counselors work to establish rapport with their clients. According to Ms. Choice, this is essential if the counselor is to adequately address each client's needs:

Another thing that becomes important in setting up vocational services is to work at engaging the client and building relationships and rapport. . . .In order for you to really help them to identify what may be an appropriate match, you're going to need to know information that, unless they trust you, [they] are not going to share. So you may come in [with] this job [which] is going to require that they have some reading skills, and they never tell you they never learned how to read because you haven't established that type of relationship with them.

Program Management

As noted previously, the vocational and educational department at Jericho is just four years old. Establishing a new department within an already existing program can have its challenges—most importantly, getting current staff to accept “the new kid on the block.”

Gene Estess offers two pieces of advice to those who are considering the introduction of a vocational and educational program into a supportive housing facility. First, is *staff education*:

. . .The whole staff. . .[must] understand the importance of it. . . .Have meeting after meeting where you might bring in the headlines and say, ‘Hey, this is it,’ where you might send your staff to conferences—which we do all the time—that really define what is going to happen in a couple of years to these folks if they don’t get to work, [or] if the work is not meaningful.

So I think number one is education of the staff, and number two, there has to be a leadership from the top of the organization. . . .Then, there has to be a search for staff people who will develop the trust of the rest of the staff. I think that all this is a very, very delicate balance, but I think at the core of it is that a staff has to be instructed. . . .as to the importance of work and work readiness. . . .If that’s done, then at least the transition is a little bit easier. And then you have to keep having meetings once it’s established because. . .turf issues do enter in, . . .but be that as it may, it is an ongoing educational process.

Developing a Nonprofit Business

In 1998, Jericho opened a nonprofit business, the Computer Learning Center, in a vacant storefront adjacent to their housing facility in Harlem. The Center offers computer classes and business services (fax, Internet/e-mail access, copy services) to the general public at modest cost. The Center's primary purpose is to teach Jericho clients much-needed computer skills. Jericho residents also have the opportunity to intern as customer service representatives at the Center learning business as well as interpersonal skills. Gene Estess explains more:

...When we started the Computer Learning Center in our Harlem facility, it was done for two reasons. The main reason was so that our residents could attain the computer literacy that was necessary for them to attain. . .and to keep the jobs. As an adjunct to that, we run a not-for-profit business, but I will tell you that we have lowered the prices of the services to a point where, unless volume is mammoth, we're not going to make huge monies, if at all—and that has never really been my focus. Our focus is really on the residents and their jobs and their life. . . .

As Mr. Estess notes, the Computer Learning Center is not self-supporting. He offers this cautionary note to those who are considering the formation of a nonprofit business:

There seems to be a movement throughout the land in various private agencies, social service agencies, to start not-for-profit businesses. I think that's admirable in one degree, but in the other I would say to you that initially, most businesses fail. Therefore, to start a business with the thought in mind that the profits of the business will help fund the social service agency is generally speaking—there are some exceptions in the country—but generally speaking, it's pie in the sky.

Jericho has also recently organized an economic development committee to search for funding for residents who might be interested in starting their own businesses. Part of the funding would pay for those individuals to obtain training in how to start, plan, fund, and maintain a business.

Working with Employers

Jericho staff work to build relationships with employers who may be interested in hiring their residents. Jericho's job developer spends a good part of her work day reaching out to potential employers and maintaining communication with those who have used Jericho's services. She sells Jericho's program based on the following:

- ! Jericho staff will meet with employers to identify their needs and requirements;
- ! Jericho can save employers time and money by providing pre-screened and qualified candidates for the positions that need to be filled; and

! Jericho will provide supportive counseling throughout employment.

Fquira Johannes offers the following advice based on her experience at Jericho:

. . .When I first began with Jericho Project, I was really gung-ho about establishing business referral partnerships and getting all these jobs flooded in, and what I've learned in that experience is, I was able to establish partnerships with these employers and get all these jobs coming in, but the clients were not ready for those jobs, and it weakened the relationship with the employers. It's always best to assess your population. . .and also to establish a type of relationship with employers that's not based on placement, but is based on the fact that we have a program here, and we can provide referrals. . . .

Ms. Johannes also notes the importance of building a client's soft skills and selling this to an employer:

When we contact an employer, it's always best to give them as much information on how qualified our people are. So in my package, I would include something that focuses on the building up of the soft skills, and when they see that, then they say, 'Oh, maybe this sounds really good.'

I don't know if an employer thinks of it in terms of soft skills or any of those technical things that we use. . .I don't know if he looks at it and says, 'Oh, I need that and this is just what I was looking for,' but my job would be to say, 'Look, I've thought about it and I think that you may need this, and we have it.' So, I would be responsible for helping them to see that is indeed a need, and this is a great thing that we're offering here.

In order to ensure that Jericho is addressing employment needs, they have established a business advisory board. Periodically, the Jericho staff meet with a small group of employers who have hired their residents to gain feedback—to find out what works and what does not from the employers' perspective.

What is Success?

Fquira Johannes describes success for residents as a process, not necessarily the achievement of a specific goal:

One of the most important lessons that I've learned in my year at Jericho was just how the process is different for different people, that the process is not necessarily measured by success. Because a lot of times, we may set a goal and go through different steps and are not able to accomplish that goal and feel like it's failure. But it's not necessarily failure, because now you have some type of outcome to look over and see what worked, what didn't work, and something to build from there and go on and to establish another goal. . . .

Ms. Choice has a slightly different view of success at Jericho:

When dealing with the word success, it is important to us to have a very broad definition of what that is. Success to some people is college graduation, is some kind of professional work, whether it be in social services or something else. Success to others who might be learning disabled, who are not able to get their GED, who are not able to go to college, might be something other than that. I would think that success for us is that we view it as, number one, sobriety; number two, doing something gainful; number three, understanding their responsibilities as human beings, whether it be for their family and friends or for themselves.

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Factors to Consider in Assessing Readiness for Work

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| • Chemical Dependency Status | • Level of Responsibility for Self |
| • Medical/Legal Status | • Desire to Work |
| • Psychological Status | • Alternatives to Work |
| • Attainment of Basic Needs | • Pressure to Get a Job: Sources |
| • Anticipated Personal Needs | • Expectations from Work |

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